RESTORATION REVIEW

Christlikeness is what God wants to see in us. If we had to sum up in a single sentence what life is all about and what God is up to it would be: *God is making human beings more human by making them more like Christ. — John Stott*

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Three Great Secrets of the Early Church

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The Adventures of the Early Church . . .

THREE GREAT SECRETS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS

And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection. — Acts 4:33

And great grace was upon them all. — Acts 4:33

And great fear came upon the whole church. — Acts 5:11

Great power, great grace, great fear — these are the secrets of the marvelous story of primitive Christianity. I refer to them as "secrets" because they are characteristics of the primitive church that are often overlooked. They are also secrets in the biblical sense of being mysteries in that they reveal the true nature of the early church, traits if hidden obscure the real picture. In Eph. 3:3 Paul refers to "the mystery (or open secret) was made known to me by revelation," a reference to God's purpose for the church. While Paul was here referring to the "secret" that Jews and Gentiles would be one new body in Christ, these "great" passages refer to that church in action.

It was not just power that moved them but *great* power. This power was the result of being filled with the Spirit. Jesus had promised them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8), which was realized on Pentecost in Acts 2. Before Pentecost there was weakness, for the apostles all fled in cowardly fear and even denied knowing Christ, but after Pentecost they were as bold as a lion. It was this boldness that caused the Jewish leaders to realize where the apostles were coming from; "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Sometimes fame, fortune, or station in life evokes boldness, but the apostles had none of these. They were of the rank and file, and yet they spoke with such power and conviction that their superiors marvelled. They thus recognized that they had been with Jesus. What an exciting adventure! Humble men proclaiming a message of redemption with such boldness as to astound their officials! Here we have a secret of their power — a boldness fired by the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

There is also the dimension of prayer to this boldness. They were bold because they prayed for boldness. Note the reading of Acts 4:29; "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness."

Once they prayed like that the place where they were gathered shook and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). Fervent prayer and an infilling of the Holy Spirit resulted in the "great power" that the historian tells us about. Is this infilling of the Spirit repeatable and continual? Had they not already received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? It appears that in the crisis of being arrested for preaching the gospel that the Holy Spirit endows them even more, especially as they prayed for such power. It is a theme that Luke stresses, as in Acts 4:7; "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them . . ." The authorities clearly had a problem that was too much for them: the power of the Holy Spirit in common fishermen.

Do we in the modern church really want such power? Do we not fear it? Do we not suffer from the malady of not wanting? Perhaps it is because we are not persecuted. But we should be bold in our faith because of what we believe. A religion of "great power" is contagious, as it was in ancient Jerusalem: "But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). The word that they proclaimed was the one great fact of the gospel, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This was the great truth behind the great power. They really believed something! It was a truth that changed their lives and changed their world. Once they had seen the risen Christ, life could never be the same, and they didn't want it to be the same. The resurrection of Christ was for them the central fact of all history. It showed that God's love was both overwhelming and redemptive. In the resurrection there was an answer to sin. And Paul was later to insist that it was reason enough for a man to repent, there no longer being any excuse for ignorance, and that in the resurrection there was proof that God would bring all men to judgment (Acts 17:30-31).

Great power! Their secret can be our secret if we will desire it and pray for it as they did. If as a Spirit-filled, praying church we will know only Jesus Christ and him crucified, we too will have great power. There is no power in our systems or in our gimmickry. Putting an "educated man" or "a smooth speaker" in the pulpit is not enough. Their great power was not in pulpits but out in the streets and in homes, where the people were. But even in our assemblies if we will lift up the risen Christ as the hope of the world rather than to lay on folk the trappings of our party we will be powerful for God.

The second secret, great grace, not only refers to the fact that they were the beneficiaries of the gospel of the grace of God and thus saved by grace, but that the graciousness of God had made them gracious. They were gracious in that they were liberal to the point of it being incredible. Acts 4:34 is an amazing statement: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need."

When we realize that many of them were slaves and most of the rest were poor, it is amazing that there was not a needy person among them. It has always been true that it is the poor that takes care of the poor, just as it is true today that it is the old that takes care of the old. There was no coercion to their liberality, for it sprang from their generous hearts. It was grace, *great* grace, motivated by love. They sold their property and shared the wealth because they wanted to, not because they had to.

Their attitude toward each other is reflected in Acts 4:32: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.”

Here is unity realized in mutual love and concern. It does not mean that they saw everything eye to eye. It means that they were unselfish and gracious. They did not hold property in common in a legal sense but in that they were now family and as sisters and brothers in the Lord it was a “what’s mine is yours” attitude. This is the only real unity there is, for if such a spirit of love and generosity is lacking it doesn’t matter about doctrinal agreement. They agreed in what mattered: Jesus was the Lord of glory, the risen Christ, the fulfillment of all their hopes. And they were his; it was a covenant relationship. And so they had each other because together they had Jesus. So poverty, which must have been real and deep, disappeared overnight. They had enough loaves and fishes that no one had need. What an adventure this was for them! It was great grace.

This was a secret to their success in reaching out. The record assures us that the people held them in high esteem, and “more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:13-14). This is the grace that everyone can see and understand, not book grace or theological grace, but the graciousness that is evident when it is inspired by the indwelling Christ. They were now the Body of Christ and “members one of another,” which must be the most challenging description of the church. Ponder the majesty of the concept, *members one of another,* and you will see what Luke meant by great grace. Since poverty in one member hurt the other members as well as the afflicted member, they excised the poverty. They found a way.

This does not necessarily mean that we are to solve a similar problem in our day precisely as they did theirs, by selling our property. Such examples might be followed or they might not, depending on circumstances. But we too should have the spirit of “all things in common” in some way, and we too should see —to it that no one among us is in need. The great grace that was a secret of their influence can be upon us also.

Equally impressive was the “great fear” that pervaded the primitive church, and we see from Acts 2:43 that fear was a reaction as early as Pentecost: “And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” The same Greek word

for *fear* is found in Acts 5:11, but the circumstance is different, and so fear becomes *great* fear. The word means everything from terror and dread to reverence and awe. Paul uses it as he sizes up the sinful human condition: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18), and when he describes the Christian life as “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The angelic cry from heaven is to “Fear God and give him glory” (Rev. 14:7), and man’s ultimate duty has been defined as “Fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecc. 12:13).

Fear turned to great fear upon one of the most amazing incidents in primitive Christianity, the death of a man and his wife, Ananias and Sapphira, which occurs as an execution for lying to the Holy Spirit. It is the kind of story that one would expect in the Old Testament rather than in the New. Ananias and his wife joined others in selling a piece of property and giving the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the poor, but with an important difference. They gave only part of the purchase price to the church while claiming they were giving it all. They sought to deceive. In lying to the church they lied to the Holy Spirit, and yet Peter described it in terms that would apply to all sins: “You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4).

The apostle Peter also recognized that it was Satan that had tempted Ananias to lie and to deceive. Satan has been at it since the Garden of Eden, tempting man to mock God and assuring him that he will *not* have to reap what he sows while God tells him he will. “You will not die,” he told Eve. He says the same to the smoker: “Others may take lung cancer but you won’t,” or to the one who commits homosexual acts: “You won’t contract aids,” or to the one who wants to drink and drive: “You won’t have an accident.” And he would tempt us to believe that we can get by with sinning.

This explains the great fear that came upon the church (Acts 5:11). They saw with their own eyes that the penalty for sin can be swift and sure. The church had now grown into the thousands, and it was probably a large assembly that gathered in the portico of the temple before which Ananias presented his gift. It was really a sin of pride, for he wanted the esteem of the church for his generosity, such as Barnabas had, who had made a similar sacrifice.

There was no way for Peter or anyone else to know of Ananias’ deception, so he must have felt secure, even when Peter asked him if he were giving the full amount. It was revealed to Peter that Ananias was lying, and God must have seen this instance of gross deception as a threat to the young church. Ananias falls over dead, a clear case of divine execution, and he was immediately buried, which in itself was not unusual. Three hours later Sapphira comes into this same large assembly, and not having heard of her husband’s death she too lies and the same judgment is pronounced upon her.

Two very public sins and two very real executions! If the same rule were applied to the church today, we'd likely have a plethora of funerals. But in time we'd have less sinning!

The fear generated by this chilling incident poured over into the community. While the townspeople held the church in high esteem for its moral standards, the record tells us an amazing fact about their reaction: *None of the rest dared join them* (Acts 5:13). While the church had enjoyed rapid growth, it suddenly came to a screeching halt. For a time no one would join the church, lest the penalty of sin be too severe. Such a conclusion as "If you join the church you may get yourself killed!" was possible. But it was not for long, for as the church continued its powerful witness "more than ever believers were added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). The judgment against Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates that God is indeed in control and that he takes sin seriously. And it reveals that there is a place in the hearts and minds of us all for the fear of God.

When we are shocked and disturbed by this story (Why did not Peter simply call for this couple's repentance?), it may help to recognize that their execution does not necessarily mean that they were eternally lost. God's grace surely reaches out to an errant believer whether he lives on to repent or not. If not, we all have cause for something more than great fear, for we have little hope if we have to be free of sin when we die. Ananias and Sapphira, who may have otherwise been exemplary members, served to jar the community of believers into the realization that God cannot be mocked and that Satan seeks to destroy the church by sin. Such "great fear" is always in order in whatever age of the church.

Paul warns us all: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he shall also reap" (Gal. 5:7). The world does not believe this, and so it continues to mock God to its own destruction. It is doubtful that even the church believes it. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" may apply as much to the church as to the world. Where is the church that is marked by great fear as well as' by great power and great grace?

These three secrets — great power, great grace, great fear — may also be viewed as principles of unity. When we find our power in the story of the Cross and preach Jesus Christ as the risen Lord, we will have little interest in party squabbles. When great grace fills our hearts in service to suffering humanity, we will find that such service unites. Great fear will cause us to shun such a gross sin as division among Christians.

We might conclude as does 1 Jn. 4:18 that "perfect love casts out fear," but who has perfect love. Jesus had perfect love, but even he feared God, according to Heb. 5:7. Love should be the motivating power in the life of the Christian, but we all are to stand in awe and fear of God, however much we love him.

Only the fear of God will rid our world of its tormenting moral plagues, whether terrorism, drugs, child abuse, crime in our streets. And only the fear of God will restore that sense of awe and worship that is lacking in both the church and the world. — *the Editor*

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A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR OF *THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT*

Through the good graces of a Christian physician in California this special edition has been prepared especially for ministers within the Stone-Campbell heritage. The publisher has mailed an invitation to thousands of preachers, offering those who have not yet read this history a free copy of this special edition. The doctor's only stipulation is a promise to read the book.

This in itself is history-making, for it is unusual for one to have such a love for a heritage and such a desire that its story be appreciated by those who are its heirs as to underwrite the publication of thousands of books. The physician believes that the story told in this book, with its tragedies and triumphs, will serve to bring our fragmented Movement closer together. He believes we might find healing in our common roots and rediscover principles that will recapture the dream we once had for the unity of all Christians.

That I have not yet met this physician and do not even know to which group among us he belongs, and do not care, is consistent with the impartiality I sought to reflect in the writing of this book. It is not a "house" job and it makes no effort to identify any "brotherhood" among us as "the true heirs of the Restoration Movement." I can ask no more than that the reader will also endeavor to be impartial in the reading of it.

At this point in our history we might look to this doctor, whom I presume wishes to remain anonymous, as a sort of weather vane that points us in the right direction. He has something we all need if we are interested in putting ourselves back together, a love for his heritage and a passion for the unity of all Christians, starting with the Restoration Movement itself. In this respect he reflects the essence of the Stone-Campbell Movement,

which Dr. Robert Richardson, its first historian and most articulate spokesman, described as “This reformation was born of a love of union, and Christian union has been its engrossing theme” (See p. 363).

There is strong evidence that the dream of these two doctors, one from Campbell’s day and the other from ours, has not died. A survey of some of the events that have transpired among us since the book was first published in 1981 will attest that the vision of Stone and Campbell lives on.

In 1984 some 100 leaders from Churches of Christ (non-instrumental) and Christian churches gathered at Ozark Bible College, Joplin, MO. for a “Restoration Summit,” a unity effort after the order of those occasional meetings that date back to the Murch-Witty efforts of the 1930’s and 1940’s and the Annual Unity Forums of the 1960’s and 1970’s, which are recounted in this volume. The Joplin “Summit” was followed by another in Tulsa, and then still others, including one at Pepperdine University in California. The intention is to make the unity summits ongoing. .

Unlike the earlier efforts, these unity summits have enjoyed broad support from institutional leaders of both churches, even though they have been vigorously opposed by some of the more conservative preachers and editors in Churches of Christ, who see such efforts as “fellowshipping error” and “compromising the truth.” But for most of those who gathered at Joplin and Tulsa it was a “first” experience in tolerance and forbearance “with brethren that we hardly knew existed,” as some of them put it.

Many of those who attended the summits bore a message of reconciliation to their churches back home, which may prove to be their most salutary effect. The minister of a large Church of Christ in Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex gave a Sunday evening sermon on his experience at Joplin, a jubilant report of a joyous fellowship with brethren he hardly knew he had and a plea that there be more of the same.

The editor of the *Christian Standard* represented the Christian Churches in the summit at Pepperdine which evaluated those in Joplin and Tulsa. In an editorial report he quoted one preacher who expressed his own sentiment: “The 1800’s were a century of unity and growth. The 1900’s have been a century of division and stagnation. May we lay the foundation for the 21st century of unity and growth.”

That winds of change are blowing is also evident in current publications. In 1985 the Churches of Christ launched a new, up-beat journal that has an old editor but a new look. *Image* is staffed with the church's more open writers, both men and women, and the editor has announced a policy that transcends the sectarianism with which he is "fed up." One of these writers whom the right-wing dubs "liberal," perhaps because he was once one of them, has published a widely-read book, *I Just Want to Be a Christian*, in which he revived an old motto by telling his people that they have nothing to lose and much to gain by being "Christians only" rather than "the only Christians." The book may cause waves when it distinguishes between "the Yellow Pages Church of Christ" and the universal Church of Christ that is made up of all the saved.

An older journal, *Mission*, branded as "ultra liberal" by the same right wing, recently conceded the unthinkable, that the Church of Christ has become "a full-blown denomination." This aversion to "denomination" in the Movement's history is odd since Alexander Campbell had no problem in referring to this people as "We as a denomination," while challenging his antagonists with "You'll never make a sect of us." Unlike Campbell who accepted denominational status as a matter of fact (a distinct religious community) but rejected sectarianism as an intolerable sin of heart and mind, we still use the terms as if they were synonymous.

Still another significant development occurred in 1985 when the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Texas called a gathering of "changing" Churches of Christ, which was especially for the churches marked "E" in *Where the Saints Meet*, which is "A Directory of the Congregations of the Churches of Christ." The "E" stands for ecumenical or "more open to persons among the denominations." It proved to be so helpful in identifying new directions that the elders have been encouraged to make it an annual affair.

Christian Church leaders are having tough dialogue with each other as well as with their non-instrumental brethren. The *Christian Standard* reveals that things were said in their recent St. Louis Forum that they could hardly have said a generation ago in their confrontation with the Disciples of Christ. Not only is "restoration" being more critically defined, but the old controversy of *Who is a Christian?* which produced Campbell's Lunenburg Letter, is being revived, and this time with less passion and more reason. One noted preacher proposed that all those who accept the lordship of Jesus Christ should be accepted as Christians, while an eminent educator, who was with the armed forces that liberated Dachau, referred to Martin Niemoeller, an unimmersed Lutheran, as a Christian, one reason being that the Nazis considered him one, a pastor who ministered the Word to

the dying masses at Dachau. And he dared to conclude that he found God's church at that concentration camp — even if there were no members of the Christian Church or Churches of Christ imprisoned there!

If the Disciples of Christ were not part of the recent unity summits (Were they invited?), it does not mean that they are indifferent either toward the other groups or toward our common heritage. In a review of this book the editor of *The Disciple* wrote. "We welcome more information about the life and thought of Churches of Christ and 'independents' in a time when communication is diminishing," and in a later issue the journal reproduced this book's account of Cane Ridge in a cover story about that old Restoration shrine. And a seminary professor, in a review in *Discipliana*, thought this book might serve "as a foundation upon which future efforts at unity within the movement may be constructed."

These affirmations would indicate that the Disciples are not only still mindful of their heritage but of the other wings of the Movement as well. And when they published their *A Handbook for Today's Disciples* (1981) we can think of them as speaking for us all when they said, "As we enter the closing years of the twentieth century the polar star of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) remains undimmed. The quest for unity proceeds as a quest refined."

There is therefore a growing appreciation among all three churches of the genius of the Movement in its origins, which this study identifies as a plea for unity based upon the absolute essentials of the faith, allowing love and liberty to rule in matters of opinion and methods. This means that our forebears came to see that unity and fellowship are not predicated upon agreement in all things, but that agreement, to the extent that it can be realized, comes as a result of unity and fellowship.

This book is about men and women who believed that the prayer of Christ for the oneness of his church can be realized, and in the crucible of hardship and controversy they forged ideas and principles for the answer to that prayer. That their dream of a united church appeared to die in the fragmentation of the unity movement they launched does not detract from "the great idea" they bequeathed to the Church of Christ upon earth. We have a great heritage. The torch has passed along to us. The more we shake it the brighter it will burn.

"The whole world is the sepulcher of famous men, and their story lives on, woven into the stuff of other men's lives." — *Pericles*

(My book, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, was recently sent to 2,650 preachers of Churches of Christ free of charge, being paid for by a beloved physician. The only condition was that they promise to read it within six months. To those that made that promise and returned the signed card, College Press sent the book. I prepared the above special preface that was inserted in each book. We present it here because we believe it will be of interest to our readers. — *The Editor*)

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"WITHOUT GOD, WE CANNOT; WITHOUT US, GOD WILL NOT"

This pungent line from the pen of Augustine, that great theologian of the ancient church, speaks as much truth as most any sentence that one could produce. The old bishop presided in Hippo in north Africa, which became the theological center of the church of the fourth century due to his influence. He had a way with words, some of which were both cryptic and controversial, such as "Love God and do what you please." If you crowded him on that one, he would have you conceding that if one really loves God he will do what pleases God.

But when I think of Augustine I think of the woman behind the man. Not his wife, for Augustine never married, but his mother Monica. If you are looking for a name for a promising baby girl, how about Monica? She shines in history as one of the most spiritual women of the church — of any age. Augustine could never forget his mother and her prayers for him, even when his life was steeped in sin. Due to her influence he kept praying to God, "Give me chastity, but not yet," the kind of prayer man is tempted to pray. Augustine couldn't or wouldn't control his passions, so he had a way of taking unto himself concubines, a practice not uncommon in his day.

Monica, righteous but not self-righteous, would visit with her son even when he had a concubine at his side. But she urged him to give up his concubine and seek out a wife and live for God. And she never ceased praying for him. The occasion came when Augustine allowed the Scriptures to fall open where they would, and his eyes fell upon Rom. 13:11-14, particularly the lines "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

That did it. The Spirit used those words to cut Augustine to the heart, a man now 32 who had lived a life of sin, as he would afterwards "confess" in his *Confessions*, now a classic in devotional literature. He proceeded to obey Christ in baptism and gave the rest of his life in quest of the *City of God*, the title of another of his great books. Augustine was touched by the grace of God, an experience that he never forgot, and God's grace was the theme of his remaining years. Perhaps no one in the history of the church this side of Paul saw sin in all its ugliness as did Augustine, but this may be because he saw grace as few men have. Or is it the other way around? Perhaps he saw grace bountifully because he saw sin bountifully.

His mother's prayers were answered, even if after her death. He not only buried her, but his 18-year old son as well, by one of his concubines. But now he knew the grace of God, which according to his *Confessions*, is the outpouring of God's unconditional love. Few have come to hate sin, their own sins, as did Augustine. And he never forgot the godly, prayerful life of his mother.

Yes, you might name your daughter Monica, and as she grows up tell her about Augustine. Monica gave to the church one of its greatest princes — and she never gave up even when she visited with him in his sins.

Now you can better weigh that impressive statement, *Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not.* Where would one find a more meaningful truth, one packed with such theological significance? Understood and believed, it would help answer some of our most difficult questions about life. It is so embracing as to serve as a synopsis of a believer's view of God and the world. I am impressed by the magnitude of its meaning. It is vintage Augustine, drenched with both the grace of God and the mind of God.

The first part, *Without God, we cannot*, reveals Augustine's reliance upon the grace of God, which he would no doubt apply to all aspects of life. Because of God's grace we have bread, but the wheat has to be harvested and milled, and the bread has to be baked. Loaves of bread do not come tumbling down out of heaven. We *can* have bread, but only with God's blessings. Coal, iron, lead, copper are all by God's grace, but they have to be mined to be of any value to us. We cannot have any of these things without God. Even so with life itself, for as the Scriptures put it, "In him we live and move and have our being." Augustine speaks to the pride of man who supposes he can build his tower of Babel without any thought of his Creator. Without God, we cannot do anything.

It is noteworthy that the venerable bishop would emphasize the converse as equally true, Without us, God will not. Yes, we have bread from God's hand — "Give us this day our daily bread" — but only as we are willing to do our part. If we leave the coal unmined, we will freeze to death. Without us, God will not put bread on the table or heat in our homes. Augustine is not limiting the power of God. It is not that God cannot, but that he will not. The bishop was drawing upon both Scripture and human experience. We learn that God will not do things that he could do. He is putting us through school, and he does not do our homework for us.

Even though Augustine believed in predestination, the one doctrine in his theology that church councils afterwards rejected, he placed emphasis on man's free will. While God's grace is a free gift, Augustine insisted, man receives that gift by responding through faith in loving obedience. There is something for us to do to be saved, but grace is nonetheless a free gift. God will take away our sinful nature, he believed, and make us new creations, but only through our faith in Christ. So Augustine saw the gospel in his aphorism, *Without God, we cannot be saved; without our response to his grace, God will not save us.*

But God's grace goes beyond this in that in his aggressive mercy he pursues sinful man "down the night and down the days, down the arches of the years," as Francis Thompson puts it in his *The Hound of Heaven.* It is not that God simply proffers salvation on a take-it-or-leave-it-basis. The one He calls He pursues. The Spirit works on the person's heart. God is unrelenting in his grace, being "bountiful in mercy," and the greater the sin the greater the grace, leading Paul to respond with, "Shall we therefore sin that grace may abound?"

But still God pursues so as to evoke a response in the sinner. It might be said that God gives him the power, even the motivation, to respond, for grace is overwhelming. Still the sinner *must* respond, and in the light of Scripture it is evident that even among the called, those to whom God extravagantly manifests his grace, not all are chosen. Some repudiate the grace. How sad those words of Jesus: "Often I would have gathered you, but you would not" (Lk. 13:34). *Without us, God will not!*

Augustine's maxim is applicable to common-sense issues as well as to the soul's salvation. We all know that a schoolboy has to do more than pray if he is to make his grades. Prayer plus study! And those who advance in their profession "by God's grace" are those who have applied themselves. We would all be pleased for the surgeon who operates on us to be a man of prayer, but we would choose the pagan surgeon who knows his stuff

over the praying surgeon who is long on prayer but short on skill. It is well for a preacher to rely on the power of God, but if he does not apply both heart and mind to the task through diligent study God's power is not likely to be evident.

We cannot do it without God, but God will not do it without us is a truth that touches the whole life and one that exposes a shallow concept of the nature of God, such as makes him a kind of errand-boy or a bell hop. Our notion to "leave it to God" may be as superficial as "leave it to Beaver." We may assume that God does a lot of things that he will not do. I always pray that God will watch over me as I travel and that is especially appropriate for one who drives over Texas highways — but that should make me no less defensive in my driving or less cautious in keeping my car in good running condition. And to take special care in inclement weather. God will not watch after a fool driver, no matter how much he prays.

I do not believe in praying for the weather, to the dismay of some of my readers. I thank God for the weather, both "good" and "bad" weather, and I praise his name for all the wonders of nature, including the weather. When I take kids on a picnic, I do not encourage them to pray for a "nice day," except as our right attitude makes a day nice, rain or shine. We should pray for a joyous time together and make the best of the day, whatever kind of day it is. Nor do I ask God to abort a tornado or cause it to strike someone besides me. I believe in storm cellars, closets, and common sense!

I believe in a world of snow tires, raincoats, storm windows, and sanding crews, and I thank God for them all. It is a world in which we are almost certain to get hurt, and maybe badly hurt, however much we pray. Heart attack. Cancer. Accidents. Murder, perhaps by a drunk driver (I support MADD, for I am mad at drunk drivers, and prayer alone will not get them off the highway!). And I believe in the police, armed forces, laws, and courts of justice. In Dallas a man was recently convicted of scalding a four-month old baby to death. A transvestite, he masqueraded as a girl and baby-sat for this couple, who may well have been deeply-devoted Christians. At our church last Sunday we prayed for a Dallas family that lost a son in the crash of the military plane in Newfoundland. It was the fourth child this family has lost in violent accidents!

Electric evangelists like to parade "victorious prayer" on TV, whether those healed of cancer, delivered from bankruptcy, or saved from foreclosure. They make it a simple matter, one only needs to pray with them then and there. Name it and claim it, they say. There is no need to be poor or sick or unemployed. Trust God! Pray! This can leave the wrong impression and has the potential of doing great harm. What will hundreds, even

thousands, think who have suffered for years of untold agony from a legion of tragedies and with no relief despite constant prayer — and many no doubt in response to the pleas of these evangelists, both in terms of prayers and dollars. What does it do to their faith? Perhaps these evangelists presume to know too much about what God will do and is doing. I suspect that old Augustine would be more cautious than that.

Can we not say that these tragic things happen to us all, saints and sinners alike, because we all live in a troubled world? Yes, of course, God sometimes delivers one from some calamity while not delivering another, and for reasons known only to him, but how can we know the mind of God and thus serve as his counsellor? One who boldly asserts "God spared me!" from a fiery airplane crash while scores of others perished, might do better simply to thank God that he is still alive. It might only be that he was sitting in the right place on the plane.

What really matters is that God has promised to be with us through all the uneven experiences of life, and that in the end he will give us the victory, however brutal life may prove to be. And that He will even take the brutalities and use them to His glory and for our good. That is what prayer and faith are all about: not for escape but for resources of power "For the Living of These Days," as the great hymn puts it.

Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not. Augustine may have been inspired by those words from Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The one who wrote those lines lived a life of incredible suffering and at last died a martyr's death.

That tells us something of what the pilgrim's progress is all about. We may have the wrong idea if we suppose God will carry us through the skies on flowery beds of ease, as another old hymn goes, with little or no suffering, with no burdens to bear, with no haunting, impossible questions to face. We do well to remember that He is in control, and that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. — *the Editor.*

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OUT OF THIS WORLD

By W. Carl Ketcherside

In John 17:13, Jesus points out that one part of his preparation for return to the Father was to share some things while still in the world. This was done that the envoys might have his joy fulfilled in themselves. The original of the word for joy is *chara*, gladness, delight, happiness. Jesus entered the world to the sound of angel song, "Joy to the world," and now he is going to leave with his joy fulfilled in men: They were given the word of the Father, and they had the assurance that the Holy Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance, "whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). Theirs would be a perfect recall.

They had to endure the hatred of the world. That hatred was not something to create wonder. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13). Jesus said, "If the world hate you, you know it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). We tend to love our own. There is an old saying, "Every crow thinks its own is the blackest." So the Lord says, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Yet, Jesus did not pray that they should be taken out of the world. They were the light and leaven of the world. They were the salt of the earth. They had to be in contact with it. They had been chosen and ordained to go and bring forth fruit. They would pay the price in a world which hated them. That price, with one possible exception, was death. Jesus did not want them removed from the world, until the world itself proved unworthy of them. He did pray that they should be kept "from the evil." The word for evil is *poneros* and may refer to temptation, thoughts, or trials. Inherent in it is any destructive attitude or action, and Jesus did not want their testimony to be influenced for evil. Like Jesus, they were not of the world.

Our Lord asks that the Father sanctify the apostles by His truth. The word sanctify is from the Latin *sanctus.* It means to consecrate or set apart for a holy purpose. It was used of things as well as people. It corresponds to holy or hallowed. The truth of God has power to sanctify us to His service. And, as a rational being we contact that truth through His word. It is His means of communication, and our means of dedication. It is to be deeply regretted that we live in an age when the word is circulated so widely and known so little.

God sent Jesus into an alien world. It was a world made by him and yet it knew him not (John 1:10). In spite of that he was the true light, which lights the way for every man who enters the world. Just as the sun rules the day by giving light, so the Son rules the world by giving moral and spiritual light. Those who seek to ignore him by closing their eyes walk in darkness and are blinded. They do not affect the light, but their own condition. The sun shines as brightly on a world which refuses to see it as it does upon one where every person has his eyes wide open. Just as the Father sent Jesus into a world which rejected him, so Jesus sent the apostles into that world.

He consecrated himself to the work of the Father for their sakes, so they might be consecrated through the truth. They needed a role model. Jesus not only gave them the truth, but he gave them an example of perfect reaction to it. He told them and showed them. He left an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:21). He was the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, going on in advance and blazing a trail through an alien world. The reason Jesus consecrated himself was for the sake of the disciples. He wanted them to be sanctified in the truth. In the final analysis this meant being consecrated to him.

Of transcendent importance to us is the fact that Jesus did not limit the scope of his prayer to those he had been given as ambassadors by the Father. The word “apostle” means “one sent on a mission.” Involved is the sender, the one sent, the mission to be accomplished, and the message by which it is to be accomplished. The apostles were dispatched into all the world. They were to proclaim the Good News to every creature. They were God’s servants in the winnowing process. Those who believed were the grain. Those who refused to believe were the chaff. And Jesus prayed, not alone for the apostles but for all who believed in Him by their testimony.

Belief in the person of Jesus on the basis of testimony was to make the difference. Our salvation was made to hinge, not upon the breadth of our knowledge of things, but upon the depth of our faith in a person — one who lived and died in the realm of history. This is one of the most amazing demonstrations of divine wisdom and ingenuity. It is our only hope of achieving fellowship. We can agree upon him and his identity. The apostolic message was one of sincere faith — producing assurance that Jesus is the Son of God. And all who believe that are to be one. The fact that Jesus prayed for them to be one is proof that all may not be one. We tend to pray for those things which we desire to see transpire.

Yet we must not forget that this was the Son praying, and while he does not arbitrarily act to force men into a certain pattern of behavior, neither does he petition God for what is vain and impossible. And while the sad record of the past points otherwise, my hope for

the future of true oneness of believers in Jesus in unquenched. I expect the prayer of Jesus to be honored. Whatever it takes to achieve it I am sure the Father will provide. I do not expect to live to see it, much as I would like to personally hail the great day but I feel the time is coming when the brotherhood of man will be as wide as the acceptance of Jesus. May God hasten that auspicious day! — *4420 Jamieson, C-1, St. Louis, Mo. 63109.*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Princeton Seminary reports an interesting development that reflects a significant change in the church at large. While a few years back, the typical seminary student was a young man just out of college, more than half the students today are from the outside world, many of them in mid-career. There is also a much higher percentage of women.

The Disciples of Christ are beginning a pilot telephone network project in an effort to hold on to the 67,500 Disciple families that move every year. An “800” number will receive calls from churches from which a family moves and in turn will inform the church closest to the family’s new home. They figure that if they can hold on to an additional 10% of their mobile members they will reverse their trend and begin to grow. This method is being encouraged among churches in general and by the National Evangelistic Association. It is assumed that the estimated 80,000 Church of Christ families that move will immediately identify with a new congregation, but this may be a false assumption. Our studies indicate that in the typical city we will have as many or more non-active members as active.

Ouida and I are now carrying cards indicating that we have willed our bodies to medical science. I like the idea that when the time comes Ouida will only need to dial a number, thus avoiding all the fuss and “arrangements.” And we are both pleased that medical students will be able to make use of our bodies once we have taken our leave of them. The director of anatomy at the Southwestern Medical School in Dallas wrote us both nice letters commending us for making “an important contribution to medical education and research.” While he did not promise, we presume that they will not call for us before our time! If you are interested in doing this yourself, you should contact your state university’s medical school. Part of your decision is that there will be no burial. The remains are eventually cremated.

If you have not already, you will surely see the Texas Sesquicentennial Wagon Train on TV sometime in the next six months. Two families in our church in Denton are with it on its long journey up and down Texas. One of our members, Don Stringer, is its creator. So we have a map of its itinerary on our bulletin board, with all its stations marked with their dates, and we are praying for it all the way. We don't exactly ask the Lord to "Remember the Alamo!," but it is something like that. But God is longsuffering toward his special people, the children of Israel and the sons of Texas!

We remind you of the conferences for more open Churches of Christ at the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Tx., near Dallas, Feb. 20-22. The theme is "The Nature and Challenge of Christian Liberty," based on Galatians. Subjects include the nature of legalism, balancing baptism, proper use of Scripture, freedom from strife, nature of freedom, the Lord of Liberty. Speakers include Ervin Waters, Mark Berrier, Bob Douglas, Cecil Hook, Joe Jones, John Wright, Ed Fudge, Wayne Dockery, Bill Love, Bob Randolph, Julius Hovan. I have been asked to address the closing session on Saturday morning, at which time there will be a Communion service. Those already in the Dallas area are urged to take advantage of this opportunity. The location is 1710 W. Airport Fwy and the phone is 214-259-2631. The opening session is Thursday, Feb. 20 at 2 p.m.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I hope you will do an article on why those who are so close in their views are often the most at odds with one another. — *Talmadge McNabb, Brown Mills, NJ*

(This is an interesting question, perhaps one for a psychologist. Some of our readers might like to write us their answer as to why. Offhand I would say that we are not as threatened by those who are far from us theologically as those who are near. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because he was close enough to them and their followers to threaten what they loved most, their system. They would have ignored him had he been a Pythagorean priest. Even a yellow-dog Texas Democrat opposes a turncoat within his party more than he does a Republican. — *Ed.)*

The nice thing about your writings is that those who are the "somewhats" cannot close you down. You do not have to guard yourself against what others may think or do. I'm glad that there are a few editors that enjoy such freedom. — *Homer Matson, Jefferson, OR*

(If I belonged to "the System" or if this journal were a party medium, I would have been out of business long ago. But the freest editor is in a sense the most bound, for he is bound to his own conscience and to his sense of duty and mission, and most of all to God. *What does God think about what I write?* is the only question that matters, and it is by far the most sobering. — *Ed.)*

This is an exciting time to be alive on planet Earth. I'm thankful that the freedom we have in Christ allows one to enter fully into the joys of the eternal Spirit rather than merely to sit as a passive onlooker, legalistically bound to denominational traditions. — *Harold Shasteen, Centerville, IL*

Restoration Review really makes me rethink my position on many issues that I felt were cut and dried. Thank you. — *Max Moore, Sweet Home, OR.*

I am of the music persuasion but that is a personal matter, maybe because it helps me to sing. The reasons we give for being divided must cause the rulers of hell to meet every first day of the week and rejoice. I'm 74 and I hope I live to see us use the terms church and worship with the right meaning. You might tell brother Ketcherside that he has refreshed me for a long time. Keep up an unrewarding work. — *Clyde H. Keck, Ashland, OH*

Your article in the December issue on the "Roman Catholic Church of Christ" was the finest. As a member of "The Church" for more than four decades, I never before realized how much we have in common with the Catholic Church, probably because I was raised with such a prejudice against Catholicism. Your article was like a spring flower completely dissipating the fog. The illustration of the striking similarity between our "Eldership" and their "Priesthood" helped me more than anything else to understand where we are at the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ. Whether we got these concepts from the Catholics or made the same mistakes in interpreting the Scriptures, your reference to both being misled by the same mentality may help us to re-evaluate some of the authoritarian concepts we have developed unto perfection. I hope you will keep writing on this subject, for it will help us remove the shackles of authoritarian leadership. — *Bob Scott, North Little Rock, AR*

(The reader will recall from previous news items in this journal that it is this church that is now in a lawsuit over the "freedom of information" issue. Bob Scott, a Little Rock attorney, is representing those in the church who are asking the court to order the elders to release information regarding the financial affairs of the church. We will keep you informed on the outcome. — *Ed.)*

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BOOK NOTES

Those who may be neglecting the Old Testament in their personal study would do well to read Bruce C. Birch's *What Does the Lord Require?*, an easy-to-read study of the great events in Israel's history, especially the exodus, the exile, and the restoration. These great events, along with Israel as a covenant people, serve to show how God's people are called to social witness. From a Christian perspective, the author asks not only what we are to *do* in a broken world but what we are to *be*. 8.95 postpaid.

Limping Along by Bela Vassady is a confessional autobiography of a pilgrim theologian, one that has long been involved in the ecumenical movement. The title is borrowed from Calvin, who said it is better to limp along in God's will than to move full speed ahead outside his will. Vassady found himself writing a confessional of his own struggles as he told his story of a pioneer theologian-ecumenist. If you are interested in the struggle for a united church, this story will interest you. But it is also a love story of a man and his wife who labored and hoped together and who, in their admittedly childish dream, would like to die together. Since this story begins in Vassady's native Hungary, the reader is also exposed to the larger East-West world and its trauma. 13.95 postpaid.

Smoke on the Mountain is as imaginative a title as the book is creative, which is a study of the Ten Commandments. When C.S. Lewis, who wrote the preface, refers to this book as a union of passion and intelligence he might be referring to the author treating "Remember the sabbath day" as "A Day of Rejoicing" or "Thou shalt not steal" as "You Can't Cheat An Honest Man." The author, Joy Davidson, writes with a woman's heart to men and women alike. 7.95 postpaid.

You can have all the issues of this journal for both 1983 and 1984 bound in a handsome 400-page volume, entitled *The Doe of the Dawn*, which was our theme for those years, for only 10.50 postpaid, which is hardly more than the subscription rate. It has its own preface and table of contents.

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